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Development: History and Power of the Concept

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Abstract. This article provides an alternative reading of the history of development by tracing how the concept of development has accumulated its present power. It starts from the premise that whatever development is it is also a concept, which is deeply ingrained in our 'Western' habitus and can inform and guide our action. Contrary to suggestions that it was 'invented' once –at whatever date – and then spread elsewhere, I argue that it emerged gradually by being born and reborn in different contexts several times. Thus, its history is not that of direct genealogical continuities but rather parallels generated by similar structural circumstances. Commonly criticized for its ambiguity, I argue that much of the power of development actually stems from its linguistic polyvalence: its different meanings make it useful for many different purposes. Yet the concept is held together by a more coherent structural frame, which consists of the combination of its uses in three main senses: ideal, processual and intentional. Building on research on colonial history, I locate a birth of development in European colonialism, where it worked as an unacknowledged condition of colonial exploitation. It has also other antecedents that remain insufficiently understood. Having been introduced in the South as a notion for colonial exploitation of local resources, after the World War II its function changed again. At the dissolution of the colonial empires it was taken into its present use as soft power by Western powers and anti-colonial nationalists alike and was transformed into the foundational concept of developmentalism. But its power has limits. Ultimately, while concepts can and do affect people's behavior, they work within the dynamics of material and mental interests.

Keywords: development; history; colonialism; conceptual history

Introduction

Discontents of development are many and calls for its abandonment persist (Ziai 2017, esp. Ch. 5). Its heyday seems to have passed as the use of the term 'development' in literature has come down since the early 1980s (Google Books 2019). Yet the repeated news of its death (from Sachs, 1992 to most recently Brooks, 2017) have over and over proved premature and there is all the reason to believe that development will remain among us for a foreseeable future. It not only refuses to die but has gained a boost as 'sustainable development'.

I argue in this article that the idea of development is something that is so deeply engrained in our 'Western' habitus and even in human condition that it is unlikely to easily lose its attraction. To understand this, we have to realize that whatever else development is, it is a concept; and concepts have power to inform and guide our thinking and action. Rather than an amoeba-like buzzword (e.g. Rist, 2007), or 'empty signifier' in a Foucaldian discourse structured by its own structures (Ziai, 2017, pp. 149-150), development is one among the basic socio-political concepts which have power to frame our thinking of what is desirable and doable and how. A notoriously slippery term, development still has an internal structure which both enables and limits its use. This structure has been long in the making and in this article I sketch how development has historically accumulated its conceptual power. We need to appreciate where that power comes from and how it works in order to understand why development is, in Gilbert Rist's words, able to continue to 'seduce, in every sense of the term: to charm, to please, to fascinate… but also to abuse, to turn away from the truth, to deceive…' (2014, p. 1). I have found little of such appreciation in most existing histories of development, including Rist's own, otherwise very valuable study.

My argument is based on two premises. First, the obvious fact that in terms of its substantive contents there can be no commonly agreed definition of development is no reason to worry. The same ambiguity is true of *all* what Reinhard Koselleck, the doyen of the German *Begriffsgeschichte*, calls basic historical and political concepts. As he puts it: such concepts are the

concentrate of several substantive meanings. ‘A concept must remain ambiguous in order to be a concept’. (1985, p. 84) Even more importantly, not only are such concepts always contested, but without the ambiguity of their substantive meanings they could not work as political concepts, informing and guiding political and social action and gathering different aspirations and interests under the same conceptual umbrella. Yet, secondly, in spite of the proliferation of meanings and disagreements, concepts do have a more coherent core of meanings, which goes beyond their diverse substantive definitions. Although there can be no ‘correct’ definition of a *concept*, it does not follow that *words* have no meanings that can be captured. Thus we need to trace both semantic and conceptual changes, and I suggest that by doing so we find development emerging gradually in several places and remaking itself several times. In this article I focus on the crucial contribution made by European colonialism, also hinting at its earlier European antecedents.

History of development seems to be attracting more research attention. Yet serious attempts have been few and the big picture remains hazy. In much of mainstream development studies, in particular in its more critical ‘post-developmentalist’ variant, it is assumed that development is something that was ‘invented’ only in the post-World War II period, the favorite candidate somewhat unlikely being the Point Four in the inaugural speech the U.S. President Harry S. Truman in 1949 (in addition to Sachs, ed. 1992, for instance Rist, 2007, 2014; Ziai, 2017). Historians of European colonialism have long been aware that this is too shallow a view: they have found in the European colonial practice an abundance of activities, which would nowadays count as development (for a restatement, see Hodge and Hödl, 2014; Hodge, 2014) But there has been disagreement among them as to when the development endeavour actually started. Was it during the late colonial period, as political reform of British colonialism against rising tide of Afroasian nationalism (Cooper, 1997, 2002)? Or earlier, in the immediate aftermath of the First World War as an unintended consequence of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 leading to the League of Nations mandate system and the emergence of the ‘world’s first development plan’ for China by Sun Yat-

sen, as a response of the post-war national humiliation. (Easterly, 2013)?[1] Or perhaps originally, 'development' had nothing to do with what we today call the global South and its poverty, or even colonialism but it was rather invented the early 19th century at the heart of Europe by French positivists, as a response to tumultuous social transformation created by the breakthrough of industrial capitalism? (Cowen and Shenton, 1996)? But if you propose to an Asian or African audience that development is something that began during European colonialism or in Europe even before it, you are certain to get the riposte: are you suggesting that we did not have any development before the European intervention?

Some help from Wittgenstein and Koselleck

Obviously, when we speak of development, we do not speak of one and the same thing. Development is employed both as descriptive and normative concept. It can empirically refer to something that has happened or is happening or it can evoke an idea or ideal of what should happen – a goal of action or a vision. Likewise, development can denote both the end of a process of change, taken either empirically or normatively, or the change process itself, or the means to achieve that end or goal. It can mean either an endogenously unfolding process or something emanating from conscious, intentional intervention, and this very intervention. Even if we speak 'only' of economic and social development, as the discourse of international development does, its meanings cover a huge range: from modernization to poverty reduction, from economic growth through increased productivity and production of more or less necessary gadgets to fundamental values of good life and the enlargement of human freedom.

To make sense of this mess of meanings, we must in the spirit of multidisciplinarity turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and the German tradition of conceptual history

[1] Sun Yat-sen's plan had been also noted by Javier Gonzalo Alcalde (1987, p. 92) and hailed by Eric Helleiner as the first development plan of Southern origin on record (2014, pp. 376-378).

(*Begriffsgeschichte*). Although these traditions do not communicate much with each other (cf. Richter 1995, Ch. 6), both agree that the starting point of any analysis of language is the recognition that words and concepts necessarily have several meanings. Wittgenstein who originally thought that 'whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent' (2005, p. 27) realized later that it is much more complex. Language rather is a 'form of life', and an 'instrument', which is used to actively mold the world. Words are tools in the making of society. 'The meaning of a word is its use in the language... Let the use of words teach you their meaning' (Wittgenstein, 1995, pp. 88, 20, 220). If so, polyvalent, multiple-use words such as development have no hidden essence. They mean whatever we make them to mean when we use them at any given moment and context. Our language provides us with a 'picture' that does only reflects and describes but guides and conditions our thinking and actions. Such an image can grow so powerful that we cannot discursively assess its strengths and weaknesses; it has such an evocative power that it takes us captive. (idem, pp. 29, 48)

Words have power; but obviously some words are more powerful than others. Wittgenstein did not elaborate much on this but fortunately help can be found Koselleck. He distinguishes words from concepts, and further differentiates basic historical or sociopolitical concepts from technical or analytical terms. Not every word is a concept but concepts are expressed in words and words do have meanings. Such meanings change continuously and the changes can be traced. In the process of concept formation, several meanings of words come together and change both separately and together. In Koselleck's words, 'A word may have several possible meanings, but a concept combines in itself an abundance of meanings … the meaning of words can be defined exactly, but concepts can only be interpreted': (2011, p. 20):

> A concept emerges only at the point when the meanings of those individual terms which describe a common set of facts perform not merely a descriptive function, but also point to and reflect upon relationships among them. What changes in the history of a concept is not merely one meaning of a word to another meaning. Rather the change occurs in the entire

> complex of meanings that have entered into the word, in both their makeup and their interaction.

Concepts are beyond definition because they have a history. Quoting approvingly Nietzsche Koselleck says: 'Concepts, insofar as they involve the entire process of semiotics, cannot be defined: only that which has no history can be defined.' (2011, p. 20). As put by a colleague of his, 'the history of the word "development" is characterized by the fact that it has always added on new meanings; still the older meanings do not disappear but remain in use. Here lies one of the grounds for the polyvalence and ambiguity of the present notion of development.' (Wieland, 1975, p. 199)

But this is not all. Although the substantive meanings of the word development have gone through several transformations throughout its existence, it also has more enduring uses in a more abstract, structural sense; and these have been much more limited. Focusing on the latter, we can see that during the course of its emergence, development, as we now understand it, has gained an interrelated core of meanings and thus transformed into a concept. Whereas it still can be and is used in many more restricted and commonplace senses and in our development discourse it has a wide spectrum of more substantive, mainly ideally tinged meanings, it is used in three basic senses of (1) ideal goal; (2) process of change towards that goal; and (3) action to produce such a process.

These varying meanings have, of course, been noted in many studies, although not always explicitly and very consistently. Fredrick Cooper and Randall Packard juxtapose 'self-propelled processes of social change' to 'blueprint for action' (1997, p. 8). Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton (1996) make the same distinction by using the terms 'immanent' and 'intentional' development; and Gillian Hart distinguishes between 'big D' Development as interventionist post-second world project from 'little d' development as the set of contradictory historical processes of development of capitalism (Hart 2001, p. 650). But these writers elide the role of the ideal goals. All three senses appear already in H.W. Arndt's 1981 article and a great variety of meanings are displayed in Rist's passage through development discourse (2014) but they are not seen to come

together to form a concept in the above sense. Perhaps the most compact discussion so far has been provided by Alan Thomas who basically recognizes the same three senses, formulating them more specifically within the parameters of present-day development discourse: 1) a vision of a desirable society 2) a long-term transformative historical process of change, and 3) deliberate efforts aimed at improvement, or 'whatever is done in the name of development'. He acknowledges that these are 'of course related' but considers the third sense of the term, the action undertaken by development agencies, states, etc. to be dominant now. (2000a: esp. pp. 29, 40; 2000b, pp. 777-779)

Thomas' case is a particular one, referring to a late incarnation of international development. More generally, the three basic senses or dimensions of development can be formulated as follows: 1) a desired goal, an ideal state of affairs to strive for; 2) a transformative process, or rather set of processes towards that goal; and 3) intentional human action on the belief that a well-meant intervention will trigger processes leading to what we ideally regard as development. But to make development a concept it is not enough that the three senses are there. They also have to form a unity which encompasses all of them and transcends their individual meanings. Development becomes a concept when its different dimensions start to inform each other, i.e. when the ideal becomes a yardstick for assessing both the change process and intentional action, as it can only be achieved through these. It does not matter if its ideal substance keeps evolving - from economic growth to good life, from filling investment gaps to good governance. In whatever sense the word development is used in addition, and there, of course, are many, it is this composite meaning that functions as a political and social concept and fuels our development endeavor.

Long way from word to concept

How long has development been around as such a concept? The semantic history of development remains to be written (Arndt, 1981and 1987, deals with economic development only). This is not the place to attempt the broader task but enough is known to sketch a rough outline as a hypothesis

for further work. [2] Here it is crucial to realize that the word development, in its different linguistic guises, has right from its first birth denoted something that is actively done by humans in order to produce a certain goal. That is what distinguishes it from parallel notions such as evolution or progress. We will go astray if we start searching its etymological origins in such natural metaphors as change or growth as for instance Robert Nisbet (1969), and Rist following him, have done. Nisbet's study, fine work in its own right, is not about development at all, in the above sense, but about progress; and Rist who duly embraces all the dimensions of development fails to see the concept for the words and thus misses its underlying driving forces.

A look at historical dictionaries reveals that when the word development first appears in Indo-European languages, in French maybe as early as in the 12th century as *desveloper* and in other languages probably in the 17th century, it takes place in the verb form (*développer*, *develop, entwickeln*). This is an active, transitive verb, with a subject and an object: the earliest meanings seem in all cases to have been related to unfolding or unrolling of something folded or rolled up; and from that, go over to bringing out something which exists in germ or in otherwise in a latent or elementary form. It. was only later, when it was appropriated to biological and then to social vocabularies, that it turned into a substantive and went beyond the early, rather technical meanings and further evolved into an intransitive verb denoting self-generating change, taking place in spatially unequal manner.

This crucial shift may have occurred roughly at the same time in the late 18th century but in different ways in different countries and languages. While in German mainly scrolls were 'developed' still in the 17th century, the first political and social meanings of the word have been traced to the latter part of the next century. Koselleck counts *Entwicklung* among his major

[2] The sketch is based on the following: Arndt, 1981; Dufour, 2014; Klein, 2003: 208; Koselleck, 1985: pp. 78, 241-2, 245 ff., 257-8; Latouche 1988, esp. p. 42; *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989, pp. 562-4; Pörksen, 1988, p. 33; Rey, 1992, p. 594; Wieland, 1975. pp. 199-203; Williams, 1988, pp. 102-4.

‘concepts of the future’, or concepts that have ceased to merely define given states of affairs and started to reach out into the future and inform human action. (Koselleck, 1985, p. 78; 1997). A number of such concepts, including ‘progress’ and ‘history’, emerged in German during the S*attelzeit,* or the threshold period, a time of great political, social and intellectual transformation ca. 1750-1850. Hegel famously made development of Absolute Spirit the kingpin of his philosophy and several writers took it over, Marx’ materialist reading endowing it with immense political clout.

Yet development never entirely lost its original sense and it regained much of its early activist imperative during its latter transformation. In German, it became a concept of goal-conscious, if not necessarily consciously planned action again, indicating a belief in the power of human knowledge and human intention to shape the course of history towards desired goals. ‘Development, which in the Nature is a peaceful emergence, is in the Spirit a hard, endless struggle against itself’, was how Hegel put it (quoted in Wieland, 1975, p. 219). Obviously, a similar transformation took place in English as well, and, at a slower pace, in French. *Développement* was widely used but mainly in its processual sense. As a full modern concept it came to a wider use only in the 1950s.

All the way till today development has retained much of its original sense of action of bringing out something which already exists in a germ form. This is so in particular in some of the remaining technical usages on the word, such as those related to real estate or pre-digital photography. But even these meanings are not innocent or irrelevant to what I call the core political meaning of development. They all belong to the same family; indeed, they back up and define each other in several ways. The original meaning still underlines and colours the rest. Whether as ideal, as processes or as intentional interventions, development deals with something which is thought to be developable from its more embryonic present form into a full future form. The end-result is immanent in the beginning, something which both justifies and necessitates its development. Although all the different meanings and the combined concept itself have their own histories,

development as a concept is remarkably a-historical: it looks forward but not backward. Development by definition always gets started anew from a blank slate.

This way of looking at the concept of development enables us to give up the search for its single 'invention' and removes the need to argue whether it took place before or after 1949, or even earlier. Rather than tracing a genealogical lineage starting from a single ancestor, or a doctrine once invented and then travelling back and forth across the globe, an alternative history of development takes a radically different tack. It sees development as a variant of an enduring human tendency to act intentionally to change existing conditions, and follows how it is born and reborn in different guises as different historical situations emerge. In this perspective, we do not deal with historical continuities in a genealogical sense but rather with historical parallels produced by shared intellectual elements within similar structural circumstances.

When claiming that development is also driven by a human tendency to act intentionally to change existing conditions I am not trying to de-historicize what obviously is a most historical phenomenon. Rather my argument is that 'development' has not been there always and most probably will not be for ever. I am just referring to the simple idea, common to all humankind, that if something desirable does not seem to happen on its own, it can be made to happen by intentional human action. This notion is by no means limited to development or even modernity. A fairly strong version of it was modeled already by Aristotle in his practical syllogism. It says that if certain premises are rationally accepted, the logical conclusion is action based on them (Wright 2009, pp. 26-29, 96-118). Against this, development as a malleable and essentially ambiguous concept, can be seen to emerge and re-emerge to guide and justify a variety of actions as required in changing historical situations, and it is far from the only concept that works that way. The same human inclination can be activated by many other concepts as well.

Crucial contribution of colonialism

What then might have been the major historical situations that had created needs for which development specifically seemed to provide an answer? I suggest that some of them can be found in European colonialism, starting in an indirect way from the colonization of North America. Such needs were greatly intensified by 'small d' or 'immanent' development at home, the rise of industrial capitalism in Europe in the 19th century and the varying pressures it created, as well as the everyday demands of 'new colonialism' in Asia and Africa fomented by it. But as it turned out, development did not work in the colonial context in a way that could have rescued colonialism from its unavoidable demise. It was itself rescued by an unholy coalition of decolonizing imperialists and Afro-Asian nationalists. In this process it once again recreated itself.

The 'colonial origins of development' are in the fashionable neoinstitutionalist discourse explained by the different trajectories of the West and the Rest resulting from divergent cycles of good ('inclusive') or bad ('extractive') institutions that had started from more or less accidental conditions at the outset of colonization (most notably Acemoglu et al., 2001; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). This has had it empirical critics (e.g. Austin, 2008; Jerven, 2011), with whom I broadly agree, but here I wish to tackle the colonial origins of development from an entirely different angle. Taking development not only as a set of processes of change, but also seeing it both conceptually and practically connected to intentional action towards a desired goal, I suggest that ultimately development is something that must be regarded as an unacknowledged condition of colonialism.

The presence in colonialism of practices we nowadays think of as development is not news to historians. It is acknowledged even by French-speaking writers although French used for them the term *mise en valeur* instead of *développement* (Rist 2014, p. 48 ff., esp. p.56). Also English-speakers who argue that development in its present meaning appeared only late in colonialism and mainly for political purposes, acknowledge the earlier presence of such activities but do not see the nexus between them and later 'colonial development' (e.g. Cooper, 1996, pp.32-33. 67; Zachariah,

2012, pp. 27 ff, esp. 34, 80-2). Not disputing its subsequent political function, I suggest that these early activities have to be included and development must be seen around almost from the very beginning of the colonial endeavour. The main point here is not the timing but the function. Development arrived as an imperative to develop the resources of colonized areas, something which has remained its underlying driver since then. When colonialism introduced development of local resources, it in this context completed the formation of the modern concept of development, by combining intentional action with a goal and the process leading to it, and brought it into the realm of international political economy as colonial policy.

Such a development drive can be seen at work in the short-lived German colonialism; the Germans even framed, albeit unsystematically, their activities in terms of *Entwicklung*. This has not been much noted in the later historiography of European colonialism, probably because of the excessive violence inherent in German colonial practice. I have made a start to tease out the developmental strands of German colonialism in my work on the long-term development history of Tanzania, where the Germans precociously made a start from which the British conveniently could carry on (Koponen, 1994; 2014). But this was by no means a unique case. In fact, it seems to apply to all kind of colonies. It is quite evident in places that were colonized during the time of advancing industrialization in Europe and were inhabited by permanent and relatively dense populations, as most of Africa was. It can also be seen in India and other South Asian countries where colonization had started earlier in more extractive forms but intensified as industrialization advanced in Europe (Ludden, 1992). The argument can be further extended to thinly populated settler colonies such as Australia and Canada (Cowen and Shenton, 1996) and some of its earliest antecedents can be found as early as in the expansionary phases of the colonization of North America (see Locke, below).

In retrospect, colonialism has been judged as a system of exploitation, geared primarily at benefiting the colonizers; and I have no quarrel with this. Yet this does not imply an absence of development. On the contrary, only development made colonial exploitation possible. Far from

unrelated opposites, colonial development and colonial exploitation must be seen as a dialectical unity. In most areas to be colonized, easily exploitable resources such as slaves and ivory were rapidly running short and new ones had to be developed to maintain the colonial momentum. And what was at issue were not only material resources. Development also contributed to the moral justification of colonialism. Whereas the propagation of Civilization and Christianity was more to the fore during the conquest, the developmental rationale for taking over foreign lands soon emerged.

The argument was simple. If the indigenous people had left the resources of their countries undeveloped, their development was not only a right but a duty of the colonialists. 'Development' could thus be seen as mutually beneficial both to the colonizers and the colonized. European colonialism took it as its mission to make the whole world exploitable, and after a shorter or longer extractive phase, development provided both the means and the justification to do so. As long as colonialism continued, there was no way to give up 'development for exploitation'. The nexus between development and exploitation was clear to most historical agents concerned. It has only been obscured in our post-war development discourse with its conflation of development with all good things from welfare to human rights.

Actual historical processes are always shot through with contingencies and contradictions and sweeping claims as above overlook a myriad of internal ruptures and tensions. Colonial development had not only advocates but also opponents and doubters throughout colonialism. There were influential administrators who wanted to preserve and consolidate local communities under their rule and feared that any development would endanger their stability. The metropolitan states were long averse to granting funds even for running let alone developing the faraway colonies. Yet the development imperative inexorably made its way, transforming itself in the process. Indeed, it received much of its early impetus from the skimpiness of the imperial treasuries. The need to develop colonial resources was due not only to the demands of the metropolitan economy, as

believed in traditional theories of imperialism, but very much also to the urgent fiscal needs of the newly created colonial states as these had to rely on the locally extractable resources.

But, as suggested above, the roots of developmental logic went deeper. The case for the colonizers to conquer foreign lands and embark on the development of their resources neglected by the 'natives' seems to have been first made in the context of the colonization of North America by John Locke, a hero of the Enlightenment. He argued for the superiority of rational agriculture over Amerindian hunting-gathering, although he used the term 'improvement' instead of 'development'.(Locke n.a., esp. pp. 14-18; Tully, 1993: esp. pp. 158-166). Thereafter the term development gradually came into use, and the idea recurred, apparently independently, in new colonial situations. In Africa, the inability of the local people to develop their resources was a widespread lamentation in late precolonial and early colonial literature. Also the moral argument of the mutual beneficence of development both to the colonizers and the colonized was there right from the beginning. First it was a demand of a few missionaries and humanitarians. Soon it was taken over by more far-sighted colonialists before it became an increasingly accepted political demand – first from outside and then from inside the colonies themselves. Fused with ubiquitous racialism it provided a major prop for legitimizing colonialism. (Koponen, 1992)

Presently, of course, we associate development with the advancement of the welfare of local people. That this notion also has colonial origins has been known at least among colonial historians. They are evident in in the British Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1940 and 1945. But it may not be as widely appreciated how modern understanding of development the acts display. Not only was the term 'welfare' explicitly connected with the term development in their titles. Arguably an even more important innovation was the introduction of the transfer of resources as grants for projects in the colonies. His Majesty's Government gave up what was then called 'good government' according to which the colonies had to be fiscally self-sufficient and keep their budgets balanced. To be sure, there had been some imperial assistance before, in the guise of loans

for early colonial railways and some – very small - grant assistance. What was new now was that development was elevated to official policy by attempting to systematize the scattered efforts and these were backed up by far more substantial resources from London. Here we witness the birth of modern development aid. Funding in practice was considered on a project basis, but the projects had to be collated into more comprehensive plans before funds could be applied for. Although the sums that were promised never totally materialized, the 12 million pounds annually planned in the Act of 1945 came fairly close to the modern international aid target, 0.7 per cent of the donor GDP (see Morgan 1980: esp. pp. 199-200).

These acts had overtly political motivations. They were born when a slew of strikes and disturbances in different parts of the colonial empire from West Africa to West Indies had revealed the extent of colonial grievances and the onset of war had raised the need for increased resources for war efforts. Welfare was added to the title of the Acts to calm down colonial disorder and show that development was not only about exploitation of resources. As put by Sir Henry Moore, an Assistant Colonial Secretary, 'if it is just going to be mainly 'development' on the old lines, it will look merely as if we are going to exploit the Colonies in order to get money to pay for the war!' (Cooper 1996, pp. 65-73; Havinden and Meredith. 1993, 197-205; the same quote in both, p. 72 and p. 203) But even if Britain's need of more colonial resources loomed behind, this was not the first time that development and welfare came together. They shared a longer history.

Although the development that dominated in earlier colonial practice was for exploitation of natural resources, in both early French and German colonial ideologies, influential strands emphasized the role of broader human resources as well. The French policy of assimilation favoured the education of 'natives' while primary health care served also wider labour needs (Rist 2014, pp. 56-58). The German Colonial Secretary Berhard Dernburg is on record suggesting as early as in 1907 that the 'most important economic asset' of the colonies was 'the African' who had to be made 'a shareholder' in colonial development, although this was vehemently opposed by the

German nationalist settler colonists (Koponen, 1994, pp. 241 ff.). The idea of development as an evolutionary social process always lay underneath, with the implication that it could be achieved by developing resources. This became clearer after the war, when the British took the lead and put development into wider uses. In Penelope Hetherington's words, in the period between 1920 and 1940 the 'word "development" was used constantly and ambiguously'. It could refer to private capitalist ventures in mining, agriculture, or industry, which were thought likely to increase productivity, or to state-funded projects which were planned to benefit the local people. By the end of the 1930s development was also thought to be a political, economic and social process through which the British colonialists attempted to turn the arbitrarily delineated, internally disparate areas under their administration into viable 'countries'. (Hetherington, 1978: p. 90[3]; see also , Sieberg, 1985)

The League of Nations did much to bring development and welfare together. When dividing the colonial spoils of the Great War among themselves the victorious allies prudishly designated them as mandate areas whose 'wellbeing and development [was] a sacred trust of civilization' under the trusteeship of the colonialists. 'Development' and 'wellbeing' were different things, however, in the 'dual mandate' of the trustees. Quite straightforwardly, development continued to refer to the development of material resources, and this was meant 'for the benefit of the mankind'; meaning the colonial powers. Trusteeship toward the colonial peoples meant that the colonial powers also had to work for 'the advancement of the subject races', but it was far from clear what such it entailed in practice. First it was understood as a sort of moral uplift for barbarian areas suffering from slavery, injustice and oppression. (Lugard, 1955: pp. 619, 606, 617, 5) Gradually it came to encompass aspects of broader 'native welfare', not surprisingly in particular those areas that fit well with securing the labour needs such as elementary health care and education. Increasingly these

[3] She, however, speaks of 'states'. Cf. *Report of the Central Development Committee*, Dar es Salaam, n.a. but 1940, para. 7: the aim was 'to make Tanganyika a country'.

ingredients were fused into ‘social and economic development’ (Alcalde, Ch. 3). The influence of these ideas extended beyond the mandate areas of the League of Nations; they were well known even in British India (Zachariah, 2011, p. 81-82, 127).

Immediately after World War II the new international organizations joined the fray while . colonialism continued to cope with its contradictions. To Bretton Woods development ‘arrived almost by accident’ but became part of name and official purpose of the new International Bank of Reconstruction and Development; at first in a narrow economic sense, to be broadened in the 1960s. (Kapur et al. 1997, pp. 57 ff., 140). The United Nations promised in its charter to promote “economic and social progress and development” of all people (extract in Stokke 2009, p. 579). In the colonial empire, the French resorted to the use of metropolitan funds for what was now called both *mise en valeur* and development in their *Fonds pour l’Investissement pour Développement Economique et Social* (FIDES) in 1946 (Cooper 1996, pp. 176, 195).

Some European antecedents

However, colonial development was not created out of thin air. The colonial development imperatives may have sprung from the combined demands of the metropolitan economy, the fiscal exigencies of the colonial state and the needs of legitimation and justification of colonial rule, but its intellectual premises were familiar to the colonizers. They had been worked out in discussions back home. Here the argument put forward by Cowen and Shenton (1996) becomes relevant. In their view, development had originally nothing to do with any part of present-day global South. Instead, it originated in the early 19th-century Europe ‘amidst the throes of early industrial capitalism’. It was temporarily eclipsed by the ‘age of progress’ of the last half of the 19th century but reappeared when industrial capital was seen to falter in 1890-1910. After that it was hidden again until the late 1930s, which makes the assumption of its invention in the late colonial period around 1945 understandable. (Cowen and Shenton, 1996, pp. 5-6, 10-11)

The originality of the argument lies not only in the claim that the interventionist, or as Cowen and Shenton say intentional, dimension of development was invented in Europe for European purposes – but also that it was not considered a variant of the idea of progress. In their view, development was meant to work as a *counterpoint* to progress, or the consequences of it: as a means to ameliorate the social ills of unemployment and poverty (called 'surplus population') brought about by industrial progress. The distinction between the idea and the doctrine of development is crucial here. The modern *idea* of development emerged among the French positivists, i.e. the Saint-Simonians and August Comte, in the first half of the 19th century. They argued that industrially-based 'progress' could only be sustained by subjecting it to 'order' through the intentional activity of development, Cowen and Shenton suggest. What was needed to make the positivist idea of development into a *doctrine* was active trusteeship of those who possessed the right knowledge; something that Friedrich List, a German interventionist economist, in due course elevated into a 'nationalist development doctrine'. Finally, a genealogical line went down to the Fabian socialists in Britain. (idem, pp. x-xii, 28-29, 116-117, 158 ff.) But when development turns into a doctrine, it will obstruct 'true' or 'free' development, which for them is that envisaged by Marx. (idem, pp. 119, 122, 476)

This is a rich and complicated argument. I think neither its several insights nor the considerable question marks it raises have been sufficiently appreciated during the two decades that the book has been around. But overlooking the specifically colonial roots of development I am afraid Cowen and Shenton miss an essential source of it. Even more seriously for their argument, it is debatable whether the idea held by the French positivists, in particular Comte with his 'new science' of social physics, later to be called sociology, really amounts to development in the modern sense as sketched above. True, Comte's grand idea of subjecting 'progress' to 'order' through human intervention based on knowledge foreshadowed in some uncanny ways some of the major tenets of later development thinking and its technicizing tendencies, but he used the term

development in several senses, which were mostly descriptive and do not amount to a coherent concept (for a helpful introduction to Comte's thought, see , Lenzer, 1975).

Colonialism does figure in the story but only in a subordinate role. When the doctrine of development came to be implemented, much of it actually took place in the colonies. Cowen and Shenton even note that they originally started their conceptual odyssey as an attempt to understand Fabian colonialism in Africa. In addition to Europe, they think development arouse independently in mid-nineteenth century Australia and Canada in a similar situation as it had done in Europe, when both colonies faced mass unemployment. (idem, ch. 4). In India and Africa development was 'derivative', taken first from Europe to India and back and further, even twice, to Africa. It found an 'antagonistic place' in British colonial policy together with the idealist attempt to build common good of community through development. (idem: pp. xiii- xiv, 42 ff., 252-253, 294 ff.).

There is much suggestive evidence here and Cowen and Shenton deserve recognition for having directed our attention to early 19th century European discourse. In Ziai's terms, we can discern a fusion of 'social evolution' with 'social technology' here (Ziai, 2017, pp. 41, 56, 102-103, 230). However, rather than celebrated as the inventor of development, the French positivists should be counted among several of its more distant progenitors. A similar idea was widespread at that time in European thought. Political constellations were precariously recuperating from revolutionary fervour and the Napoleonic wars, and the breakthrough of industrial capitalism with its concomitant social transformations introduced created fresh disorder. The success of natural sciences in the 18th century fostered ideas of a social science and the use of social knowledge in resolving emerging social problems. The ideal of development, in the sense of peaceful evolutionary change guided by conscious human action, could be seen as a counter-concept to violent revolution. It was entertained by thinkers of several hues from early socialists to liberal social reformers. (to start with, see Koselleck, 1984: esp. pp. 749-753). Evidently, if development

could so easily be employed in colonial policy, it was because the early European discourse had prepared the ground for this and had made it a widely known concept.

From colonial dead end to rebirth as develomentalism

At this stage the argument for the 'invention' of development by Truman in 1949 looks rather hollow and no wonder it is becoming fashionable to debunk it (e.g. Easterly, 2013). Yet in our perspective, what happened was that development was remodeled to the extent that it was reborn again and Truman perhaps can claim the role of a midwife. Having confessedly been more of a means to achieve other more or less worthy things – from colonial exploitation to the legitimation of colonialism – development was elevated to a high ideal in its own right. In Rist's words, it became a 'global faith' (2014); in Koselleck's terms, it was 'ideologized' (2011, p. 13) and turned into a foundational concept of what can be called developmentalism. The post-World War II international configuration, characterized by decolonization and the rise of independent states in Asia and Africa and dominated by two new superpowers pushing for two seemingly very different yet similarly modernizing social orders, was one more juncture where development proved a useful notion. It is most recent incarnation, the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015, it is meant to **'**end poverty**,** protect the planet**,** and ensure prosperity for all' (United Nations, 2015).

Ideologization has not prevented continued instrumental use of development, however; rather it has facilitated its instrumentalization. Truman inserted the Point Four in his inaugural speech of January 1949 as he was looking for new openings to use aid as a foreign policy tool (Patterson 1973). He declared that old imperialism and colonial exploitation were now over and a fair global development program was needed. It was not a question of charity but of mutual benefit. 'Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas", – that is, us.

Overcoming it through development was in the best interest of both.[4] In this way Truman effectively delinked development from colonialism and exploitation.

Yet Truman alone would not have been able to invigorate development if the Afro-Asian nationalist leaders and their followers would not have appropriated and embraced it as their own, (as in particular emphasized by Cooper, 1997, 2002). When Truman was speaking, both colonialism and colonial development were approaching a dead end. It was becoming patently clear that colonial development was impotent to tackle the political challenges facing maturing colonialism. It had remained one notion among many similar, such as progress, civilization, improvement, and betterment. Especially civilization, with its three-tier structure similar to the modern notion of development, did much of the same job during colonialism as development has done thereafter, overshadowing it for a long time. As colonialism progressed, development gained more force but it was also reaching the limits of its usability in the colonial context. (For a Tanzanian case, Koponen, 2014; for India, cf. Zachariah, 2012.)

Above all, development alone could not provide a basis for the continuation of colonialism. This was because it could not undo the basic colonial premise of an unbridgeable difference between the colonizer and the colonized. It rather reinforced it. Making Asian and African resources contribute 'for the benefit of the mankind' would not do for the nationalists, and the advancement of promised welfare seemed rather modest in spite of the acceleration of development efforts. For nationalists, the main problem with colonialism was its denial of human equality and of the capacity of the local people to govern themselves (cf. Chatterjee, 1995). There was no way any amount of colonial development to undo it.

For Afro-Asian nationalists development provided a potent notion for their own purposes: it gave them grounds to attack colonial rule as a whole. They seized it, silencing or sidetracking

[4] A short extract of the relevant part of the speech can be found at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13282.

indigenous voices opposing or doubting it. In this way they rescued development from its colonial impasse and gave it a new lease of life, contrary to what Cowen and Shenton think happened in Europe, by *associating* it with progress. (Young, 1977, pp. 97-100). When the term development was translated into local languages, the conceptual distinction with progress often disappeared, as in the case of Swahili's *maendeleo* (Hunter, 2014). Nationalists turned the tables by claiming that development as progress did not and could not happen under colonialism. Whatever achievements there were in production, education or health, were meager; had been achieved haphazardly; and were largely due to the efforts of the people and not any government plan, nationalists argued. From now on, the drive for development provided a main legitimation of *their* rule.

It was with the conflation of those two agendas - the use of aid for development as a form of U.S. and Western soft power and the urge of Afro-Asian nationalist leaders, largely supported by most of their citizens, to take it over for their own purposes - that development finally seized the moral high ground, which it had sought during colonialism. This transformation at the latest made development a common good that everybody had to promote. Then it was it possible to deploy development in reorganizing the relations between richer and poorer countries and to turn it into the foundation of developmentalism: an ideology and praxis drawing on the concept of development and feeding on the resources provided by it, basically the funds for Official Development Assistance (ODA). With a mutually agreed moral obligation of all well-to-do countries to devote a certain amount of their official expenditure – later fixed at 0.7 per of the gross national income – to development cooperation, it brought appreciable sums of aid for purposes that could be defined as developmental. Thus the idea of development itself became a tangible resource. While colonialism exited, development was now materialized in the physical world in the shape of an institutionalized complex of organizations and institutions with shared discourses and practices, working by its own systemic logic, with its different elements bound together by the shared commitment to provide 'development' and living on the promise of being able to do so.

The developmentalist complex is based on the core belief and promise encapsulated in the concept of development: that a well-meaning, rationalistically constructed intervention in a social process will lead to development that we regard good and desirable, and that it is in the long-term interest of everybody to foster such interventions. The material resources available for developmentalism are crucially dependent on this assumption. And the subsequent proliferation of the substantive definitions of development suggests that the working of the complex does not depend on how development ideals are understood. From economic growth and modernization we have come to poverty alleviation and eradication, sustainable development and good governance; and tomorrow no doubt something new will be added. What remains is the structure: the conviction in the goodness and desirability of 'development'; the concomitant, common moral imperative to foster it; and the urge to continue doing it.

At the heart of this is a profound contradiction. Much of the ideological attraction and legitimation of developmentalism is derived from its implicit moral superiority: development is seen as a common good, which benefits all and the achievement of which everyone has to promote. Doing development is doing good. But which good and good for whom? As can be seen from our brief historical overview, it has been instrumentally used to further political interests of several sorts, from colonial exploitation and the quest for world power to material and mental advancement and national emancipation. It not only provides a great deal of the conceptual underpinnings for international interaction but also offers a justification for much of transnational political and economic intervention and the power position of local elites alike. And, if we listen to postcolonial critique, it fosters an impoverished view of human condition, overemphasizing its instrumental-rational and material aspects. It also offers a shallow view of history as it sweeps under rug the darker and more destructive aspects of past social processes. Yet while development has its winners and losers, it is hard to deny that its substantive contents, in whichever ways they are defined in developmentalist discourse, resonate with aspirations commonly held among people in the global

South and also valued in the North? It reflects widely felt needs and interests, material and mental, and promises to work as a guide for their achievement – from clean water and decent income to social and political influence and self-esteem. Both its ideological attraction and its discontents spring from the tensions contained in this contradiction.

Conclusion

In this article I have, with a broad brush, sketched an overview of the trajectories of the concept of development from its earliest, quite tangible beginnings to its present ideological usage. I have identified some of its origins in European colonialism and its take-over into anti-colonial use, however suggesting that we deal more with historical parallels generated by similar structural circumstances than genealogical continuities. The other part of my argument has been that the enduring power of development stems from its usability for many different practical purposes. The usability, for its part, comes from its historically acquired and accumulated ambiguity – only it enables development to work as a multi-purpose socio-political concept. But while development defies one 'correct' definition in terms of substantive contents, it could not work as such a concept without having a more coherent structural frame, which can be found in the combination of its uses in the three main senses explicated above: ideal, intentional and processual. As such, development carries with it several deep-seated traditions of Western thought, some of them ancient and perhaps more universal, others more culture-bound and emerging during different phases of history. However, the concept itself is a product of modernity, indicating a belief in the human power to accomplish desired goals. Maturing and acquiring the ideologized status of a hegemonic concept, it has taken over and rendered old-fashioned such earlier powerful notions as progress and civilization while at the same time to some extent carrying their message forward.

Development no doubt has proven its usability as a political concept but how about its function as a guide for social transformation? Much of what we take as development in ideal sense has happened during the time the concept has been around but how far can such development be

credited to the concept and the efforts informed by it? Such a huge question is beyond the confines of this article; it would take us to the classical issues of the influence of material vs ideal factors and the power of human design in shaping social life. I have written this piece in the belief that concepts and the ideas contained in them do inform and influence our social and political behavior but I am not claiming they do so alone – far from it. As Max Weber, not a big fan of historical materialism, once said, it is not ideas, but material and ideal interests that directly govern people's conduct. 'Yet very frequently the "world images" that have been created by "ideas" have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest.' (Gerth and Mills , eds, 1970, p. 280) I suggest that the concept of development has had such a switchman role in choosing certain tracks and obstructing others, even if the grand lines of action have mostly been guided by the changing dynamics of material and ideal interests of the various actors, and their different natural, social and cultural environments.

One of the main reasons development has been able to prosper has been its ability to mobilize resources not only for both its stated and unstated purposes but also for running the entire developmentalist complex that has grown around it. However, the inadequacy of the core resources available– basically ODA - is becoming increasingly blatant. So far development has been able to adapt and conquer new ground. It has attenuated its goals – from full-scale modernization to poverty reduction or ending 'absolute' poverty – and has assembled new means – adding human rights and good governance to investment in infrastructure and education. It remains to be seen how much longer this strategy of widening inclusion with thinning intensity will remain viable. So far development does not seem to be in immediate danger; even its fierce critics wish to retain the notion in the form of 'free' development (cf. Cohen and Shenton with Easterly, from very different premises). Such is the power of the concept. And as long as it is around we need to understand how it has functioned and continues to function, not only in order to utilize it better but also in order to protect ourselves against false promises and keep our minds open to alternatives.

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